What Is Claimed Is:

1. A method for operating a drive unit (180) of a vehicle, in which, in an overrun condition of the drive unit (180), an output variable of the drive unit (180) is set according to a preset driving strategy,
wherein at least two preset driving strategies are specified for the overrun condition of the drive unit (180); and in the overrun condition, one of the specified driving strategies is selected as a function of the driving situation.

2. The method as recited in Claim 1,
wherein the output variable is set by at least one actuating variable of the drive unit (180); and the at least one actuating variable is set as a function of the selected driving strategy.

3. The method as recited in Claim 2,
wherein an air supply to an internal combustion engine (1) of the drive unit (180) and/or an ignition angle and/or a fuel supply to the internal combustion engine (1) and/or a gear ratio is selected as the actuating variable.

4. The method as recited in Claim 3,
wherein when a first driving situation is present, a first driving strategy is selected in which the air supply is reduced and/or the ignition angle is reset in the direction late and/or the fuel supply is reduced and/or the gear ratio is lowered; and when a second driving situation is present, a second driving strategy is selected in which the air supply is increased and/or the ignition angle is reset in the direction early and/or the fuel supply is increased and/or the gear ratio is increased.

5. The method as recited in Claim 4,
wherein the driving situation is ascertained by evaluating a gradient of a variable derived from an operation of an operating element (10) or of a variable derived from a specification for the output variable of the drive unit (180); and the first driving situation is detected if the gradient falls below a prespecified threshold value; and the second driving situation is detected if the gradient exceeds the prespecified threshold value.

6. The method as recited in Claim 4 to the extent that it refers back to Claim 3, wherein the air supply that is to be set and/or the ignition angle that is to be set and/or the fuel supply that is to be set and/or the gear ratio that is to be set is ascertained as a function of gradients of the variable derived from the operation of the operating element (10) or the variable derived from the specification for the output variable of the drive unit (180), using in each case a characteristics curve or a characteristics map (15).

7. The method as recited in one of Claims 4 through 6, wherein the driving situation is ascertained by evaluating an operation of a brake pedal (15); and the first driving situation is detected if the brake pedal (15) is depressed; and the second driving situation is detected if the brake pedal (15) is released.

8. The method as recited in one of Claims 4 through 7, wherein the driving situation is ascertained by evaluating information regarding an inclination of the vehicle with respect to the horizontal; and the first driving situation is detected in response to the exceeding in absolute value of a prespecified threshold value by the inclination; and the second driving situation is detected in response to the falling below in absolute value of the prespecified threshold value by the inclination.

9. The method as recited in one of the preceding claims, wherein the driving situation is ascertained by evaluating a travel speed or a preceding vehicle or a detected obstacle on the roadway or a traffic routing.

10. The method as recited in Claim 9 to the extent that it refers back to one of Claims 4 through 8, wherein the first driving situation is detected if the ratio of the engine speed to the vehicle speed exceeds a prespecified threshold value; and otherwise the second driving situation is detected.

11. The method as recited in Claim 9 or 10, to the extent that it refers back to one of Claims 4 through 8, wherein the first driving situation is detected if a distance from the preceding vehicle falls below a prespecified threshold value and/or an approach speed to the preceding vehicle exceeds a prespecified threshold value and/or the obstacle on the roadway is

detected and/or it is detected that the vehicle is approaching a curve or a crossing or a junction; and otherwise the second driving situation is detected.

12. The method as referring back to one of Claims 4 through 11,
wherein the first driving situation is detected if a transmission downshifting is detected within a predefined time; and otherwise the second driving situation is detected.

13. The method as referring back to one of Claims 4 through 12
wherein the first driving situation is detected if, in the case of an automatic transmission, the position of a selector lever or an operating element corresponding to it is in a different setting than "drive" or "D"; and otherwise the second driving situation is detected.

14. The method as recited in one of Claims 3 through 13,
wherein in response to the detection of a fault in a safety-relevant component of the vehicle or of the drive unit (180), the air supply is reduced and/or the ignition angle is shifted in the direction late and/or the fuel supply is reduced and/or the gear ratio is reduced.

15. The method as recited in one of Claims 4 through 14, provided that it refers back to Claim 3,
wherein, in the presence of the first driving situation, a first prespecified threshold value for an operating variable of the drive unit (180), preferably an engine speed, above which the fuel supply is completely interrupted, is at a lower value than in the presence of the second driving situation.

16. The method as recited in one of Claims 4 through 15, provided that it refers back to Claim 3,
wherein, in the presence of the first driving situation, a second prespecified threshold value for an operating variable of the drive unit (180), preferably an engine speed, below which the fuel supply is resumed again after a previous interruption, is at a lower value than in the presence of the second driving situation.

17. The method as recited in one of Claims 4 through 16,
wherein a probability for the presence of the first driving situation or the second

driving situation is ascertained from which condition is, or which conditions are present for the detection of the corresponding driving situation; and the first driving situation or the second driving situation is only detected if the corresponding probability of their being present exceeds a prespecified threshold value.

18. The method as recited in one of the preceding claims,
wherein a minimum value is specified for the output variable in the selection of the first driving strategy.

19. The method as recited in one of the preceding claims,
wherein the output variable of the drive unit (180) is reduced by the first driving strategy; and the output variable of the drive unit (180) is maintained or increased by the second driving strategy.

20. A device (25) for operating a drive unit (180) of a vehicle, having setting means (185) for setting an output variable of the drive unit (180) in an overrun condition of the drive unit (180) according to a preset driving strategy,
wherein specification means (190) are provided which specify at least two preset driving strategies for the overrun condition of the drive unit (180); and selection means (195) are provided which, in the overrun condition, select one of the specified driving strategies as a function of a driving situation.